

## Against the Grain

---

Volume 23 | Issue 1

Article 30

---

February 2011

# @Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

Dennis Brunning

Arizona State University, [dennis.brunning@gmail.com](mailto:dennis.brunning@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brunning, Dennis (2011) "@Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 23: Iss. 1, Article 30.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5753>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

## Papa Abel Remembers from page 56

to the attention of users/readers. Quite a metamorphosis of vision from a firm conceived of as a regional supplier of scholarly books to a limited number of buyers.

We were well aware that we still had to walk many a mile to reach such a lofty goal. But we were well on the way. The Amsterdam office was now acquiring all the scholarly books in Western Europe. The London office was doing the same for all UK scholarly books, as well as profiling the books from both Western Europe and the UK for input to the now fully automated Approval Plan. The Sydney office covered the then growing Antipode output. The firm, of course, was able to fulfill all library-generated orders, standing orders, and approval-plan titles for libraries throughout much of the developed world with the scholarly book output from much of the developed world.

We were able to supply cataloging either in the form of card sets of various contents or in machine readable form. (The **Danish National Library** required 50 assorted cards at one time.) We had brought up under **Don Chvatal's** direction (**Don** had come to Portland from Texas to take on the complex matters associated with providing cataloging to a variety of libraries in a variety of formats) the direction of the multi-year development and implementation of a subject authority file for the **University of Texas** system. This file,

when the work was completed, allowed us to provide authoritative subject headings for our original cataloging, as well. The extensive cataloging data-base underlying this capacity also permitted us to provide "instant" libraries, the titles selected from our extensive bibliographic database, fully-cataloged from our massive cataloging database, and processed for both undergraduate libraries and opening day collections.

We had augmented our capacities for selecting the books and assembling undergraduate library systems of 50K-75K books together with their catalogs to selecting the books, assembling them, and cataloging and processing them for opening-day collections of 125K-250K books for newly established colleges and/or universities. In some cases these collections were packaged in shelf-list order, the cartons serially numbered. This procedure was followed so that the newly completed and furnished library building and newly hired staff had only to open the cartons in the indicated sequence to expeditiously shelve the collection. Several such opening-day collections of books were augmented by a collection of back volumes of the basic journals in the subject areas to which instruction/research were to be oriented. In a few cases we also provided a basic rare book collection in the subject areas the nascent library planned to build toward.

At the end of decade of the 1960s I attended, with **Bernard Starkmann** who ran our Amsterdam office, a meeting of the Scandinavian

libraries held in Copenhagen. **Bernhard** had invited all the university and research library librarians to an all-day session at which I presented the total array of the services to libraries that the firm had available. I outlined the programs and their inter-relations using a blackboard. The presentation took about six hours and traced out the firm's inter-related programs beginning with orders and standing orders initiated by a library through the flexible approval programs, through cataloging, to "instant" libraries. In the hotel that evening I reflected on the day and was astonished by what the Argonauts had accomplished in 20 years. I had never thought of what we had done in such a global and systematic way before. Our attention had been narrowly focused upon the planning and execution of one program and then the next and how they related and the connections to be made between each to create what in the global view was an integrated system for supplying all or part the prevailing knowledge of **Karl Popper's** Three Worlds and the continuing and difficult efforts to extend that understanding, as synthesized by thinkers and writers around the world. But we, or I at least, had never reflected upon the meaning of the totality of the system and its contribution to present-day conceptions. These satisfying reflections were quickly replaced, however, by the summoning up of all that remained to be accomplished, how much further this Argonauts' voyage had to go, and what labors still faced the band. 🌲

---

## @Brunning: People & Technology

---

### At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

---

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

---

#### Oh, Google

**A**ge has settled in at the **Googleplex**. **Page** is CEO, and **Schmidt** is kicked up to Chair, a cool 100 million ease the exit.

If bloggers were vultures they'd be encircling in those turquoise skies above Silicon Valley, uplifted in the thermals, lazy in anticipation of what's up.

For most of us, quality in search engine land, whether **Google** or anyone else (is there anyone else?), is and should be an issue. Yet for a long time **Google** brought quality to Web search far superior to its competitors — **Inktomi**, **Yahoo**, **AltaVista**, **Infoseek** — to name just a few. In two simple genius strokes, **Google** co-founders, **Sergey Brin** and **Larry Page**, turned bad results to good.

First, **Google** combined keywords rather than united them. Then they took the "and" away. Called implicit Boolean, this simple move overcame automatic bad results usually seen as too many and too wrong.

But as any librarian knows, three keywords are often too many and two not enough to avoid "negative success." Librarians appreciate no

results; it says so much about what is available. **Google** thinks differently, they want results no matter what.

Understandably the **Google** guys were uncomfortable with zero results which was almost as bad as irrelevant ones. To address the "something relevant" issue, they boldly and brilliantly borrowed yet another library science principle. As graduate students they were aware of **Eugene Garfield's** citation indexing, where an article's reference were defined as a measure of an article's worth. Citation indexing, they thought, could be used with Web pages through referring links. If a Web page referred to your Web page, this was a positive vote of value. At first called "backrub" but then trade-marked as "Page Rank," this unique relevance tool helped **Google** to bring forward results that were most popular.

Implicit Boolean and page rank brought **Google** to the front of Web search. It got users to the search engine

Experts estimate **Google** now has over 500 rules similar to Page Rank but now generated from analysis of billions of searches and user behavior. How they rules play out is anyone's

guess. Since text ads contribute over 97% of **Google's** current revenue, the slurry of services put into effect since going public — most notably **YouTube**, **Gmail**, and **Google Apps** — are not **Google's** secret sauce.

What amazes is that **Google** still works well for just enough information, especially news and consumer content. And it does this fast without as much as a pixel of sand descending in that hour glass of our impatience.

So then, what's the complaint? There are three: search spam, search neutrality, and comprehensive search.

Like email spam, search spam are results that game **Google's** finely wrought algorithms. Major offenders are content farms — Websites that produce keyword-rich articles likely to show up in **Google's** organic search results. A major content farm are the various properties of Demand Media. This company, planning to go public soon, generates pages of informative material across many topics. The idea is simple — get people to find your site and then click on text or banner ads running on your site.

**Google** can work on mitigating search

*continued on page 58*

spam, but just like email spam it is whack-a-mole; fix one problem, another pops up. Moreover, it tramples on search neutrality.

Over the last decade or so of search, the general assumption by everyone, including **Google**, is that all information is equal, but some information is more useful. **Google's** search rules reward the information users vote. The contest is similar to the voting on American Idol — the who, what, where, when, how, and why are not discussed. You just have winners and losers with producers in the decision seat.

When **Google** finally decided to make money through innocuous text ads whose relevance would be based on user demand expressed as keywords, they had to behave like the playing field were level. They had to convince advertisers who were paying for clicks on these text ads that consumer clicks had equal or even greater chance to be clicks to their products or services. And they had to be convinced that **Google** wasn't competing with them.

Most businesses want one-sided search but they'd settle for engineered neutrality. Here they could at least believe in value out for value in when it came to Web search and advertising.

With **Google's** advance into research, book publishing, and news, search needed to be comprehensive. If a user sought everything on a topic, there needs to be some method, procedure, or quality guarantee the search engine could do this.

Here no Web search engine is close to being good enough. Consumer search, built around product, brand, and company names doesn't need it. Unless you want to do comprehensive research. Whether it is medical, consumer, legal, or statistical — **Google** doesn't come close to providing a reliable and valid way of reaching comprehensiveness.

Librarians and others have well-documented the search problems with **Google Book** and **Google Scholar**. Now even the industry notices and **Google** has acted with a big leadership move.

#### Your Links:

[http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=james\\_grimmelmenn](http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=james_grimmelmenn)  
<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/01/google-search-and-search-engine-spam.html>  
<http://broadstuff.com/archives/2370-On-the-increasing-uselessness-of-Google.....html>  
<http://gigaom.com/2011/01/27/what-if-google-is-just-a-one-trick-pony/>  
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/charleston/chadv/2011/00000012/00000003/art00009>  
<http://chronicle.com/article/Googles-Book-Search-A/48245/>  
[http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-13/tech/people.power.cashmore\\_1\\_google-popular-search-terms-search-results?\\_s=PM:TECH](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-13/tech/people.power.cashmore_1_google-popular-search-terms-search-results?_s=PM:TECH)

## Where the Wild Things Are eBooks: Google eBookstore

After a lot and hot 2009 in eBook publishing that saw device makers and publishers roll out e-readers and books they'd sell for them, 2010 was less turbulent, less interesting. Out of the perfect storm we seemed to lose wind in a horse latitude of waiting. Readers sold widely; sales continued to trend up. Somewhere along the line we learned more new e-titles were sold than hardcover. Somehow, it was hard to imagine; what with eBook retail price often being far less than half-price on publication. Some of us might have thought, gee, I may need an approval plan for these purchases. Oh, wait, that would double the price — my bad.

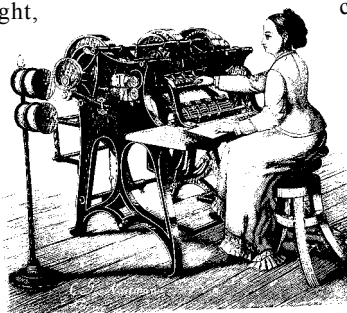
**Google** did open its long-awaited bookstore. Like all things **Google** it didn't have a grand opening; it rolled out with a brief blog announcement. The news media covered the story. But it didn't disrupt, no dire predictions of **Amazon** or **Apple** being significantly challenged. The seven-year parturition may have had something to do with it.

Too long? **Larry Page** announced **Google's** intent in 2003 to partner with key libraries to scan and digitize their collections while honoring copyright owners. This was when **Google** was still young, private, and yearning to do no evil. Once **Google** went public and everyone got rich and serious, things changed. Building the book database became let's vacuum up all book content from the libraries, scan, digitize, and require copyright owners to opt out.

As social media sites have discovered, the opt out strategy is so pre-2005. As **Google** still is finding out, no one enjoys guarding intellectual property through 24/7 due diligence. Why should publishers or authors have to ask **Google** not to sell their books? Well, even though the most immediately miffed, the **Writer's Guild** and the **American Society of Publishers**, did figure out a workable settlement to the copy now, pay later approach **Google** took, it has yet to square with foreign publishers, miscellaneous authors and publishers, and the **U.S. Department of Justice**.

**Google eBookstore**, launched in early December 2010; it is all about getting unstuck and getting to market with something. Like just about every product since **Gmail**, it is **Google** good enough. It is designed for Web browsers no matter where you find them. Any device that can point to "the cloud" and runs a Web browser can work with **Google eBookstore**. But, since most publishers prefer selling downloads of books, there are few publishers working in **Google's** cloud. Until this changes, you are reading out of copyright and little else at **Google**.

For the word on **Google eBookstore**, grab **TCA's** managing editor, **George Machovec's**, excellent summary of **Google's** eBook market entry.



#### Your links:

<http://charleston.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/charleston/chadv/2011/00000012/00000003/art00001>

#### Kudos — Haanks A lot!

When you **Google** "**Derk Haank** + interview," the Web rewards you with over 68,000 links. Disambiguate false hits (**Henks Derk**, **Dirk Henk**, **Henk the Derk**), you reach what clarity the Web will allow and **Springer's** CEO since 2004, a period of significant challenge for STM publishers, dials into clarity. **Derk Henks** owns a message that defines precisely his company's position in scientific publishing.

It is an operational message. **Springer** is a publisher for scientists, and publishing is its business. There are two customers: the scientist and **Springer's** shareholders.

**Haank's** interviews are a model of a CEO's ability and knack for staying on message. They also document a life spent on the world library circuit stating the case. Can you imagine the frequent flyer miles? **Henk's** travel database would be worth the price of a **Springer** journal.

**Haank's** several decades of publishing are ours. The explosion of scientific publishing, the pricing ascent as steep as a Saturn launch, the cold reentry splash of open access — all on **Haank's** watch which is our watch.

Anyway, in 2004, stumping the STM circuit in romantic, exquisite Barcelona, we heard the now head of **Springer** talk straight about STM publishing. His message: the format was pdf, the distribution method, the Internet, the cost, whatever the market made it, subscription or open access.

Think what you will of the message, the message is intact and complete. You know where you stand with the **Springer King**.

#### Your links:

<http://www.springer.com/societies/society+zone?SGWID=0-173202-12-488701-0>  
<http://www.springer.com/societies?SGWID=0-40801-12-489299-0>  
<http://www.springer.com/societies/springer+in+the+news?SGWID=0-161903-12-544100-0>  
<http://www.infotoday.com/it/jan11/Interview-with-Derk-Haank.shtml>  
<http://poynder.blogspot.com/2011/01/interview-with-springers-derk-haank.html>